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A 1967 conference on the nonlearner focussed on an examination of broad, major issues in contemporary American education. Among the facets discussed at the conference and briefly summarized here are educational goals and social change, the responsibilities of the schools, and controversies about the educational strategies. Also noted is the polarity between the cognitive-intellectual and emotional-motivational emphases in viewpoints about the learning process. Other issues include the need for new types of teacher training, for ways of loosening the inflexibilities of school administrations and structure, and for expansion of relevant inservice education. The value of contributions of behavioral scientists was stressed. A number of general and specific recommendations were presented at the meeting. (NH)

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THE NDEA NATIONAL INSTITUTE

for advanced study in teaching disadvantaged youth

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THE YALE CONFERENCE ON LEARNING

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REPORT/ONE

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The Yale Conference on Learning centered about "the child who does not learn." Its manner was informal; its purpose was to enable thoughtful representatives from education and the behavioral sciences to define and discuss problems represented by the nonlearning child. A list of participants and observers is appended to the report.

I

The conference might probably be best characterized as a foray into a somewhat unfamiliar and ill-defined territory by representatives of disciplines which traditionally have experienced some difficulty in communicating with one another. That the conference at least diminished this problem was evident in the discussions, which were not only open and frank but, at certain points, surprising as well. Although a number of substantive problems were discussed, some tentative solutions suggested, it would appear that a major achievement of this conference was its illumination of polarities of thought and differences of opinion existing within and across disciplines concerned with the developing child. Knowledge of these differences, represented by the attitudes and thinkings of the conferees, is not only imperative for those interested in social action, but essential to the success of any effort toward social change today.

II

Simply to enumerate the problems discussed at the conference would do an injustice to the richness of the dialog; moreover, such a listing would seriously understate the organic interrelations between the issues discussed. However, in this report an attempt will be made to describe certain lines of exploratory discussion as they converged again and again on a few common areas of concern.

There was complete agreement at the conference that the American educational establishment is currently being beaten about the ears. Certainly in recent years the inadequacies of America's schools have been the subject of constant criticisms ranging from shrill indictments to thoughtful conceptual analyses, with far more attention given to what's wrong with the schools than what's right with them. Although there can be little question that the schools' very vulnerability has resulted in certain criticisms that are unfair, the participants at the conference agreed that even when adjustment is made for unfair or inappropriate criticism, the country's educational system is plagued by broad problems involving the child, the teacher, and the school itself as an administrative instrumentality.

Schools are confronted with a growing number of children who, for a variety of reasons, do not learn what society would like them to learn, do not fulfill society's expectations for them. As a result, teachers who must daily deal with these children feel a growing sense of frustration and malaise. The pedagogical techniques with which they have been armed strike them as insufficient to the task at hand; therefore the conclusion they often draw is that the child is either impossible or that they themselves are ineffective. Moreover, the administrative superstructure of many school systems has not been and is not today characterized by the openness, the imaginativeness, nor the leadership necessary to help child and teacher in their mutual dilemma. Exacerbating these problems is the fact that the bulk of the country's behavioral scientists exhibit a certain antipathy or reluctance to become involved with the problem of the American school.

It became clear early in the conference that any discussion of the nonlearning child necessitates an examination of the major issues now confronting America's schools. The problems of teacher training, curricula, and the general treatment of the child in the school environment are ultimately bound to the question of the specific goals of the American school. Currently there appears a tremendous ambiguity in respect to these goals. Such ambiguity appears to be a resultant of forces acting upon schools from both within and without. Consider, for example, how schools have become the battleground for social change. Many segments of the society appear quite ready to use school children as instruments for changing the very nature of that society. As much as one may value the particular goals involved in such social change, one questions whether there might not be instances in which these goals are at odds with other goals to which schools are committed, e.g., the optimal learning performance of every child. This issue was highlighted by Dr. Samuel Brownell who pointed out how teachers find themselves in the midst of a political struggle when trying to do their very best with the disadvantaged child. For instance, since many of these children are slow learners, the teacher employs techniques geared to their learning rate. While this may be sound pedagogy, the teacher often finds himself assailed by the charge of cheating these children on their education. But the problems are by no means simple. It can be argued that the civil rights issue and its pragmatic consequences (integration, bussing, etc.) are more important to society and the social education of the child than are the conventional efforts of school personnel.

Unquestionably the school is the handmaiden of society, but society today is extremely unclear in its charge to the schools. One cause of ambiguity might be assigned to the view that American society is not a monolithic and homogeneous entity but rather a spirited and sometimes freewheeling conglomeration of social forces frequently in conflict. The school that attempts to satisfy all these forces usually succeeds in satisfying none and is thereby branded a failure. But a failure at what? Who shall ever know whether the school is a success or a failure until the goals of the school are clearly delineated and agreed upon by segments of society?

Is there anything that the school can do to help determine what the legitimate goals of the school should be? Much of the current decision-making has been based on very little hard evidence. If society could be objectively and precisely informed as to how a certain strategy—integration, bussing, introduction of culturally relevant materials—affects the child's intellectual and social behavior, then society would be in a better position to decide rationally on appropriate goals for its schools. In turn, this clarity and assessment of goals rest, at least in part, upon greater cooperation between school people and the behavioral scientists who possess the necessary research skills. (As will become clear in subsequent pages, this type of cooperation represents a problem in itself.)

In addition to the external forces which make the goals of schools unclear, there are differences among educators themselves as to the appropriate ends of the educational enterprise. The dispute appears to center about the very nature of the child as a learning system, with a polarity evident between cognitive-intellectual emphasis on the one hand, and emotional-motivational emphasis on the other.

Over-drawing the case somewhat, the cognitive-intellectual people view the child rather like a computer that shows up in the classroom to be programmed by the teacher. The emphasis thus falls on the intellectual pursuits, effective curricula, and concerns with those technologies helpful to the teacher in his programming task. At the opposite pole, the emotional-motivational people stress those aspects of the developing child which reflect his motivational system, his emotions, his values. The concern here is with those positive attributes which underlie all of the child's achievements, and with those negative attributes which must ultimately defeat the child's efforts regardless of both his ability and the teacher's knowledge of curricula.

The goals of the first position tend to be intellectual in nature, thereby charging the schools with the task of making everyone as intellectually competent as possible. The second approach emphasizes social competence, arguing that society has as much need of honest, reliable, and well-adjusted bricklayers as it has of physicists and college professors. The polarity itself demonstrates that the continuing possibility of the schools being branded as failures rests not on the basis of any absolute standards, but upon the particular goal to which the evaluator of the schools adheres.

The conferees were in agreement that the needs of

children and society require that a genuine synthesis of the two points of view be attempted. A new type of school is necessary in which there is an emphasis on both scholarship and personal development. Such schools can be centers for child development where the teacher is a child development specialist, not only trained in pedagogical techniques but expert as a student of human behavior in those areas particularly important to the understanding of the developing child. This school, broadening its activities to encompass more of the child's life, would be concerned with his physical well-being, with his personal determinants of success in intellectual pursuits, and with all relevant aspects of his family environment. The model for such an effort can already be seen in the Headstart program; the next logical step would appear to be to extend its principles to the elementary school enterprise. (This, in effect, has been done in a few instances.)

The success of such an effort depends on a new type of teacher training. It depends upon greater involvement by child development professionals both in preservice and in-service training, as well as in the everyday activities of the school. It depends, further, upon school systems characterized by openness, flexibility, and commitment to the goal of optimal development of every child whatever his intellectual potential. The key, then, to improving the impact of the American school rests upon solving current problems related to teacher training, to involvement of knowledgeable—but to date relatively uninterested—behavioral scientists, and to the reform of school systems that are all too ready to pursue outdated forms of education unresponsive to the needs of a large number of the nation's children.

Although the point of view presented immediately above was received warmly by many of the conferees, it was looked upon with a surprising degree of disdain by others. This disdain was aptly expressed by a superintendent of schools who asserted that he felt like a quarterback asked to devise intricate plays when his players did not even have the shoes which would allow them to get good yardage out of familiar plays. There is much reality reflected in this argument of school men who assert that the bread-and-butter problems of the schools must be solved before the schools can be open to any radically new or utopian concept.

Yet the degree to which any system can change depends on its openness to new ideas. Throughout the conference there was agreement that the typical American school tends to be a closed rather than an open system. Although a description of a problem is not an explanation, it would appear that one reason for this is the continuous bombardment of the schools with ideas and innovations quite distant from the real and immediate problems. Moreover, it is a fact—one not readily faced by many social activists—that the many pleas for change and improvement to which schools are continually subjected have not been accompanied at the local or national level by the commitment of funds and interest that make great changes possible. Too many of America's schools are wrestling with outmoded physical facilities, crowded classrooms, and salary schedules that make it impossible to attract good people. Given this state of affairs, it is indeed understandable that many pundits go unheard.

Unfortunately, this problem of the commitment of society to the educational enterprise can be solved neither by the educational establishment nor by its critics; it demands the awareness of the people and the action of their representatives at local, state, and national levels. Despite the consensus that bread-and-butter problems are not solely responsible for the less than optimal education offered to many children today, there is little doubt that until the minimal needs of a school system are met, that system will be hampered in any truly innovative effort.

Two themes recurring in recent attacks on America's schools are the "fossilization" of so many school administrations, and the failure of the classroom teacher fully to develop America's children. Although a school, like any other social institution, tends to take on an existence and character somewhat independent of the individuals who constitute it, there is a consensus that the quality of the school is in large part determined by its current administrators and teachers.

In considering the first issue, many of the conferees felt that too many of America's schools are closed rather than open systems. They suggested that there is a real need for such schools to use the services of those specialists who can analyze the reasons for such organizational rigidity. This immediately raised the question: Can schools that are indeed closed systems even engage in this minimal type of openness? School people, like any other group of humans, do not like to engage in painful introspection; nor do they relish becoming the subject of critical analyses by outsiders who can easily be accused of "not really understanding the problems." Moreover, if society is unresponsive to the pressing needs of the school, why should the school be receptive to what appears to be unrealistic demands of society in general and critics in particular? The very amount of criticism leveled against the schools, much of it recognizably unwarranted, is in itself sufficient to guarantee a certain rigidity and lack of openness. When under attack from all sides, it is adaptive for any organization (or individual) to pull in its head and defend itself behind those organizational barricades which have proved so effective in the past.

There was a feeling at the conference, nevertheless, that some of the inflexibility in many schools does reside in the personality of the school administrator as well as in the very nature of the school as conveyer of society's values and social heritage. Undoubtedly, while there are many excellent school administrators, too many schools are in the hands of individuals in-

tellectually or psychologically ill-equipped to deal with the problem of change *per se*.

The conferees were in agreement that school administrators must be selected and trained for administrative positions. The natural selection procedures currently employed in no way guarantee that schools will be administered by innovative men of vision; indeed, promotion through the teaching ranks, as is typically the case, appears to be an outmoded method of fulfilling the schools' needs for administrative personnel. Such training as the conferees proposed would involve much more than those typical courses now thought to be sufficient to retrain the teacher, and thus to produce an administrator. It must also be remembered that even in those instances where no courses in administration are required, classroom teaching—no matter how effective—does not provide an adequate apprenticeship for the demands of administration.

The school administrator must be broadly schooled in the areas of organization, human relations, and social change. It was agreed that so long as a school is in the hands of a rigid and unresponsive administration, the imposition of innovative and fresh pedagogical techniques is impossible. The need here, however, is clearly two-fold: effective training for those administrators who soon will be entering the school systems; and effective retraining of many administrators already in positions of authority and influence.

The considerable discussion given to the problems of the schoolroom teacher revealed a judgment that when all is said and done, schoolroom education is essentially a process involving teacher and child. No amount of pedagogical theory, educational technology, or administrative sensitivity can adequately insure optimal learning if it is divorced from the behavior and performance of the classroom teacher. (It should be noted here that the conferees were concerned by the continuing practice of removing talented teachers from the classroom in order to deposit them in administrative positions.)

While noting that America is blessed with many fine teachers, there was considerable feeling that a number of these same teachers operate at a level beneath their actual competence. Classrooms are too frequently populated by teachers feeling trapped and harried, facing children they do not truly understand, dominated by daily schedules which make little pedagogical sense, caught up in a bureaucratic network often insensitive and unresponsive. There was complete agreement that teachers must be provided with the best preservice and in-service training possible; likewise, there was the realization that many teachers now receive training far beneath this proposed standard.

A recurring theme of the meeting was that good teaching is intimately related to a knowledge of child development. The educational psychology taught to future teachers must involve much more than theories of learning supplemented by a smattering of information concerning outcomes of applied educational research. Too, prospective teachers must be conversant with the principles, dynamics, idiosyncracies, and social mores of particular American subpopulations. All of this must then be coordinated with a knowledge of techniques and subject matter in such a way as to insure a creative translation into the everyday activities of the classroom. This job, if formidable, is far from impossible; indeed, instances of such training and classroom application can be found throughout the country.

Much emphasis at the meeting was given to the importance of in-service training and the role of summer institutes for teachers. The point was made that because of the student teacher's lack of experience, many of the principles taught to him during preservice training seem relatively meaningless. However, when such principles are tied to actual, daily interactions between teacher and child they become the vehicles of understanding and of sound practice. The learning of the teacher must never stop; this learning is optimized when it is continually related to the face-to-face interactions between teacher and child.

A major theme of the conference was the relationship between behavioral scientists and educators. The centrality of this issue is understandable if one remembers that the solutions of many of the problems discussed demand closer cooperation between the two groups. Running through the meeting was a somewhat acrimonious thread of discussion, centered about the view that behavioral scientists are not making available to educators the considerable information from the social science disciplines pertinent to education.

The response to this indictment revealed a rather wide spectrum of thought. There was certainly agreement that communication between educators and social scientists is poor, that the one group has profited very little from the other. However, there was little agreement as to the reason for this state of affairs. There was some sentiment that apathy towards the problems of educators on the part of many behavioral scientists is matched by a certain hostility towards behavioral scientists on the part of many educators. A discussion of this hostility indicated that it is actually a combination of defensiveness and disappointment, understandable if one remembers that the behavioral sciences are ostensibly the knowledge-gathering arm of the educational enterprise. The teacher-in-training and the teacher-in-practice look to the behavioral sciences for those theories of learning and instruction, those validated principles of human behavior, that will be of aid in teaching. Their expectations are early dimmed when the bulk of behavioral science knowledge transmitted during the teacher training period involves dry-as-dust theories of learning that seem unrelated in any way to classroom teaching. The teacher's hopes

are further squelched during his professional career when he learns that behavioral scientists are loath to leave their ivory towers and apply their skills to the problems that daily confront him in the classroom.

The other side of this rather tarnished coin is the fact that when behavioral scientists do make their infrequent forays into schools their efforts often appear sterile to the teacher, and his normal reaction is to defend his own values in the face of what he mistakenly views as an alien onslaught.

Speaking very frankly about this regrettable state of affairs, many of the conferees pointed out that, with certain exceptions, teachers' colleges are staffed by behavioral scientists of relatively low quality. Thus, during formative years teachers encounter those behavioral scientists least qualified to provide guidance and information. Furthermore, departments of education often profit minimally if at all, from their physical proximity to first-rate behavioral scientists in the same university. If the knowledge of social scientists is to be of aid to educators, the first focus of change must be the university itself.

It was pointed out at the meetings that in spite of their vocal dedication to many value-laden principles, universities themselves often represent the most closed of closed systems. Their insulation and self-satisfaction must give way to new modes of instruction for the teacher-in-training. Academic systems must be developed whereby teachers receive the best rather than the worst training in the social sciences that universities have to offer.

Again speaking frankly, the participants pointed out that a status problem is involved in the relative indifference of behavioral scientists to problems of education. Part of this status problem has to do with the applied-basic distinction in the social sciences. The social scientist who goes about testing a theoretically derived hypothesis is seen as higher in the pecking order than the applied psychologist testing an empirically derived hypothesis concerning a practical matter dealing with schoolroom performance. There was agreement that such a dichotomy is essentially false, that the theoretical and the practical must coalesce, both for the sake of an enriched behavioral science and for the solution of practical problems at hand.

There are some signs that this state of affairs is changing; this is exemplified by the work of outstanding thinkers (Bruner, for example) who move freely between rarified theory and problems of everyday performance of children. Today growing numbers of scientists are turning their attention to the problems of the schools. An important development here is the growth of psycho-educational clinics similar to those which have been established at Yale and other major universities.

An important aspect of this development is that mutual respect must be built up between educator and social scientist. As long as the social scientist's role in the school remains that of a mere appendage to the faculty and to the daily school routine, he cannot aid the educator. The social scientists' natural habitat must be the school, for there, in collaboration with teachers, researchable questions will naturally arise. Too, educators should not expect more of behavioral scientists that these men can honestly deliver. Little is to be gained from the all too common practice of the educator's confronting the behavioral scientist with broad questions for which he expects answers on the spot. Educators must be made aware that while many of the important problems of education are researchable, they often involve long years of careful work. The appropriate reaction to this necessity ought to be a willingness to promote the research, not a disdain for the length of time it requires.

On the other hand, behavioral scientists should not shirk their responsibilities, nor continually take refuge behind the demand for absolute certainty. Child psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, and social anthropologists can be of great help to educators in the here-and-now. There is much knowledge now available to these specialists; there are many current problems of great importance to the classroom teacher to which this knowledge can be productively applied.

Dr. Seymour Sarason and Dr. Albert Solnit cited numerous examples of the help they and their staff were able to give teachers once they had commited themselves to working in the school environment. Clearly, as their examples showed, the classroom itself would appear to be the natural habitat for the specialist who wants to be of assistance to the teacher and child. The specialist does not optimize his impact by removing the child from the classroom and engaging him in an enterprise alien or barely understood by the classroom teacher. It is the teacher who must be trained by the specialist in those principles of behavior (even therapeutic teaching) that allow him to continue his interaction with the child rather than terminate it or relinquish it to the specialist.

Thus the appropriate role of the social scientist in the school appears to be twofold. First, in close cooperation with the educators, he must evolve long-range researchable questions which will eventuate in answers to teachers' pressing needs for general principles of instruction. Second, he must develop new modes of interaction with educators that will allow him to bring to the schools the important knowledge at his disposal.

III

In the course of the conference, there evolved recommendations for constructive steps toward the solutions of some of the problems raised. Since definitive answers was not the goal of the conference, the dis-

cussion resulted in a list which the conferees consider neither systematic nor exhaustive. Rather it represents a pool of suggestions for further consideration in plotting action programs.

Specific note was made of the custom in many school systems for teachers and individual specialists to work independently; this results in fragmentation of the child as well as failure to provide the educator with any real help in dealing with the day-to-day schoolroom problems. Since there are not, and probably never will be, the number of specialists needed to give adequate assistance to teachers coping with learning disabilities and behavior problems in their classrooms, one of the conferees suggested a more effective utilization of already available manpower through a redefinition of the roles of auxiliary personnel.

The need to translate the behavioral scientists' knowledge into principles applicable to education also raised questions of the quantity and quality of manpower necessary for such an interdisciplinary effort. (This is related to the previously-noted feeling of the conferees that many of those behavioral scientists most qualified to make such translations are not in educational training institutions.) It was suggested that efforts be directed toward establishing formal arrangements for sharing personnel such as joint appointments and visiting lectureships. The participants also noted the value of enlisting behavioral scientists from many fields—sociology, anthropology, economics, systems organization management, as well as psychology—in adapting educational theory and practice to the knowledge available concerning all aspects of human development and behavior.

The need for in-service training specifically directed to the problems raised at the Conference was repeatedly emphasized. A number of ideas were incorporated into this discussion as well as into the discussion related to the problem of transmitting new materials on a national scale to local school personnel. Several specific suggestions were advanced:

1. Core teams (e.g., a superintendent, a principal, several teachers, remedial specialists) from selected school systems across the country should meet for summer institute programs in topical areas such as child development, translation of psychological principles into instructional theory, and the like.

2. Summer institutes with follow-up school year seminars and workshops should be conducted for personnel in the top leadership echelons of a number of school systems. A major focus of such institutes should be the evolution of the school as an open system.

3. Nation-wide dissemination of fully-developed programs for in-service training of teachers should be accomplished through circulation of complete packages of educational materials, development of new kinds of texts and teaching devices, and new kinds of courses for local in-service training programs which will speak directly to the everyday needs of educators. One participant suggested that model schools be set up within school systems, staffed by teachers known to be effective in dealing with a variety of typical problems. Teachers would rotate annually or biennially through these schools, in a training experience closely geared to the here-and-now problems they face.

Behind the expressed feeling that American schools need a new set of models developed at the national level, lay the repeated concern about the lack of a national educational philosophy, the lack of a well-defined set of goals toward which the entire field of education might direct its future development. It was suggested that specific models for different developmental levels might be proposed, each designed for the needs of the age groups in question. For example, a model for the four-to-eight-year old (pre-kindergarten through third grade) might emphasize greater contact between school personnel and parents; in this way the role of the teacher vis-a-vis the home and community would be defined differently from that of a teacher of another age group. A child development specialist might well be an integral part of the administrative structure of such a model, either as a team teaching leader or as a consulting specialist for remedial and emotional-behavioral problems among these young children.

The conferees also suggested a specific proposal for an overall model for the inner-city school, while pointing to the necessity for different models designed for the suburban school.

Finally, it was suggested that the NDEA Institute program for disadvantaged children be completely modified in favor of a program for planned change to be developed through a series of discussions similar to the Yale Conference. This program would result in the incorporation and translation of behavioral science knowledge into a total curriculum comprised of discussion guides, kinescopes, lectures, books, library lists, and the like; these, in turn, would form the basis for an extensive program of summer institutes. Fifty or more institutes might be conducted for core groups from school systems across the country. The inclusion of school administrators in such core groups would be a key part of such a program.

IV

As was noted at the beginning of the report, no written account can justly delineate the spirited discussion of the Yale Conference. It is hoped, however, that the Conference, and this report, have given some additional focus within the broad spectrum of problems to be solved by educators, clinicians, and behavioral scientists, so that American society can fully develop its most precious natural resource—the child.

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(Professional positions as of December, 1966)

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